

VZCZCXR05509

PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH RUEHPB

DE RUEHGP #1014/01 2620714

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 180714Z SEP 08

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5779

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2853

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0362

RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0321

RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI 0012

RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC

RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0204

RUCPDOC/USDOC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 001014

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MTS

DEPT PASS DOL - FOR IAB AND OSEC

DEPT ALSO PASS USTR FOR KARESH, ROSENBURG, STRATFORD AND LEE

TREAS FOR OASIA/ISA-CUSHMAN AND RAND

USDOC FOR 4420/ITA/MAC/MCQUEEN AND DAS KASOFF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/18/2018

TAGS: ELAB PREL PGOV OVIP SN

SUBJECT: SECRETARY OF LABOR CHAO MEETS SINGAPORE FM GEORGE YEO

Classified By: AMBASSADOR PATRICIA L. HERBOLD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (U) August 30, 2008; 11:30 a.m.; Crowne Plaza Hotel.

¶2. (U) Participants

United States

Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao,
Ambassador Patricia L. Herbold,
Associate Deputy Secretary of Labor Anna Hui,
Dr. James Chao,
Jennifer Coxe, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor, Office of
Public Affairs, and
Senior Political Officer Dan Jassem (note-taker.)

Singapore

Foreign Minister, George Yeo,
Ng Teck Hean, Director, Americas Directorate, MFA,
Chivy Lee, Special Assistant to Minister Lee, and
Cheryl Lee, Country Officer, Americas Directorate
(note-taker.)

Summary

¶3. (C) Singapore is focused on the continued strengthening and development of ASEAN, and due to its member countries, strategically important location, ASEAN wants to be friendly with everyone, Singapore Foreign Minister (FM) George Yeo told Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao in an August 30th meeting. Singapore seeks a strong U.S. presence in Asia as a friendly counter-balance to a resurgent China, although ASEAN members are generally ambivalent about China's resurgence, given that China has historically wielded considerable influence in Southeast Asia, FM Yeo said. Georgian President Saakashvili made a grave error antagonizing Russia, FM Yeo emphatically stated. The West has mismanaged relations with Russia over the past several years, and Russia's actions in Georgia should be seen as a stern warning to Ukraine, FM Yeo asserted. FM Yeo suggested that the U.S. economic situation would likely worsen over the next year. End Summary.

Singapore's Foreign Policy Goals

¶4. (C) During a lunch meeting on August 30th with Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo, Secretary Chao inquired about Singapore's foreign policy goals. The FM replied that Singapore is focused on the continued strengthening and development of ASEAN. Noting that ASEAN's member states sit astride the strategically important Straits of Malacca, FM Yeo said it is in the organization's interests to remain strong, unified and neutral. &We want to be friendly with everyone,⁸ FM Yeo commented. FM Yeo said that Singapore seeks to maintain a strong U.S. presence in Asia, as a friendly counter-balance to a resurgent China. Northeast Asian countries, particularly China and Japan, are very hierarchical societies, and both countries tend to treat their Southeast Asian counterparts as being of less than equal stature, FM Yeo suggested.

The Rise of China

¶5. (C) Secretary Chao asked how Singapore views the rise of China. FM Yeo replied that ASEAN countries tend not to view the rise of China with as much anxiety as Western countries. FM Yeo noted that throughout much of history, a strong China has interacted with and exerted influence on Southeast Asia. Highlighting China's historical influence, FM Yeo described the voyage of Chinese Admiral Zheng He, who led a massive fleet of over sixty of the world's largest vessels and more

SINGAPORE 00001014 002 OF 002

than 30,000 sailors on a show-of-strength tour through and beyond Southeast Asia at the beginning of the 15th century. Southeast Asian countries generally know what to expect from a resurgent China and, while they do not necessarily welcome it, neither do they fear it, FM Yeo asserted.

U.S.) Russia Tensions

¶6. (C) Secretary Chao asked for FM Yeo's opinion on the current crisis in Georgia. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili made a grave error antagonizing Russia, FM Yeo emphatically asserted. FM Yeo said he hoped the United States didn't give the Georgians false hope.⁸

¶7. (C) FM Yeo commented that over the past few years, the West had made some critical mistakes in its relationship with Russia, notably over Kosovo. &Russia is a proud country, with a rich history) you kicked them when they were down,⁸ he claimed. FM Yeo told Secretary Chao that prior to Kosovo's independence declaration, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had confided in him and several other foreign ministers that the secession of Kosovo from Serbia would set a bad precedent, and that Russia would likely test that precedent. FM Yeo stated that Russia's actions in Georgia should be seen as a stern warning to Ukraine. Russia's founding and history is inextricably linked with Kiev, and Russia will never allow Ukraine to truly leave Russia's influence, FM Yeo added.

U.S. Economy

¶8. (SBU) FM Yeo commented to Secretary Chao that he feared the U.S. economic situation would likely worsen over the next year. Secretary Chao disagreed, noting the resilience of the U.S. economy, and highlighting that U.S. 2nd Quarter GDP growth had been revised upward to 3.3 percent. The U.S. economic situation would likely turn around by next spring, Secretary Chao asserted.

¶9. (U) Secretary Chao's party cleared this message.

Visit Embassy Singapore's Classified website:
http://www.state.sgov/p/eap/singapore/ind_ex.cfm
HERBOLD